

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, WALTER REED ARMY MEDICAL CENTER
6900 GEORGIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20307-5001

WRAMC Regulation
No. 40-4

18 April 2002

Medical Services
HOSPITAL ETHICS COMMITTEE (HEC)

1. History

This regulation supersedes WRAMC Regulation No. 40-4, 23 March 1993.

2. Applicability

The provisions of this regulation apply to health care providers and administrative support personnel assigned or attached to Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC).

3. Purpose

This regulation establishes policies and procedures for the effective functioning of the Hospital Ethics Committee.

4. References

a. AR 40-3, Medical, Dental and Veterinary Care, 28 January 2002.

b. Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) Accreditation Manual for Hospital, Patients Rights Chapter, Standards RI 1.1.6.1, 2002.

5. Responsibilities

a. Composition.

(1) Chairperson, Vice-Chair Consultation Service, and Vice-Chair Organizational Ethics, Staff Physicians (4), Psychiatry (1), Nursing (4), Social Work (1), Pastoral Care (1), Attorney (1), Patient Representative (1), Armed Forces Retirement Home-Washington (AFRH-W) Nursing (1), Resident/Fellow (GME status) (3), "Community Layperson" (1), Enlisted Personnel (1), Non-Physician/Nursing Healthcare Provider (1), Department of Medical Administration and Operations (1), Recorder (1).

(a) Appointment of the Chairperson, Vice Chair Consultation Service, Vice Chair Organizational Ethics, and Staff Physicians will be made by the Deputy Commander for Clinical Services (DCCS) following nomination and recommendation by the Ethics Committee.

(b) Appointment of Psychiatry, Nursing, Social Work, Pastoral Care, Attorney, Department of Medicine Administration Officer, and Patient Representative will be made by the Chief of the respective Department or Service.

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(c) Appointment of AFRH-W Nursing, Resident/Fellow, Community Layperson, and Enlisted Personnel, Non-Physician/Nursing Healthcare Provider, Department of Medical Administration and Operations, and Recorder will be made by the Hospital Ethics Committee itself.

(2) Additional recommended positions, if personnel are available: Ethicist

(3) Special Comments:

(a) All the above members are full voting members.

(b) An alternate member is assigned for each regular Hospital Ethics Committee (HEC) member in order to ensure representation during HEC consultation.

(c) It is recommended that the selection of HEC members by Department Chairpersons or the DCCS strongly consider a candidate's seniority or rank.

(d) The Vice-Chair for the Consultation Service or Vice-Chair for the Organizational Ethics will function as the Chairperson in his/her absence.

(e) The expected length of service in this appointment for all committee members is a minimum of one year. The maximum term shall be four years to allow participation by other WRAMC staff.

(f) The chairperson serves a two-year term, with the option of reappointment following recommendation by the HEC, and approval by the DCCS.

b. Functions.

(1) Ethics Consultations:

(a) Access to the committee by all patients, their families or surrogate decision makers, and WRAMC staff, for the purpose of consultation regarding ethical aspects of health care shall be ensured.

(b) At no time will any ad hoc group, independent of the HEC, be formed to consider health care ethical dilemmas.

(c) The HEC will serve as a consultative body for patients, their surrogate decision makers and WRAMC clinical staff. The HEC does not have the authority to implement changes in patient care.

(d) The focus of the HEC when performing consultations will be to maintain an impartial position in an attempt to find morally sound solutions to the proposed dilemmas.

(e) The committee will have a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for handling ethics consultations which will be reviewed annually, and will include at least the following elements: maintenance of patient confidentiality; notification of the Attending Physician of a patient for whom a consult is performed; documentation of the consult in the patient's record; resolution of conflicts following a consultation; an evaluation process of consultations; guidelines addressing how recommendations pertaining to the WRAMC organization are handled; guidelines for formal consultation of HEC; notification given to the patient, family or surrogate decision maker whenever a full committee consultation is convened; and a policy regarding the presence of patient, family or surrogate decision maker at full HEC consultation meetings.

(f) This regulation must be circulated to all WRAMC clinical departments for their information.

(g) The HEC may elect to recommend to the WRAMC Executive Committee a mandatory review of a specific issue or ethical situation.

(2) Policy Formation and Revision:

(a) The HEC is the policy advisor to the Commander regarding ethical principles for conduct regarding medical care within the medical center's activities.

(b) The HEC is responsible for authorship of any new WRAMC Regulations that pertain to ethical aspects of health care delivery.

(c) The HEC shall review, and revise if required, all existing WRAMC regulations that pertain to ethical aspects of health care as needed. This will include at least the following policies: Do Not Resuscitate (DNR); Withholding and Withdrawing of Life Sustaining Therapies; Implementation of Advance Directives; Patient Rights.

c. Education in Bioethics.

(1) The HEC participates in the process of self-education, accomplished with formal instruction, journal reviews, and review of cases and recommendations from other committees, both military and civilian.

(2) The education subcommittee is charged with coordinating continuing education for the WRAMC clinical staff regarding ethical issues in health care (minimally including DNR, Withholding or Withdrawal of Life Sustaining Therapy, Advance Directives and Allocation of Scarce Resources).

(3) The HEC will continually review and revise methods for community education in these areas.

d. Minutes. Minutes will be kept of all business meetings and full committee consultations to discuss dilemmas that involve health care at WRAMC. These minutes will be sent, no later than (NLT) five working days, through the WRAMC QI/RM office to the WRAMC Executive Committee.

e. Office of Record. For clerical support the office of record will be the office of the Committee Chairperson. The HEC is administratively placed directly under the Walter Reed Health Care System (WRHCS) Commander.

f. The HEC will meet at least monthly to ensure a process of continuing self-education in the field of Bioethics.

g. The HEC will also meet at the discretion of the Chairperson as required to perform the functions described in this charter.

h. At least 50% of the regular membership must be present to meet quorum requirements to conduct business or perform formal full committee consultations.

The proponent agency of this publication is the office of the Directorate of Information Management. Send comments and suggested improvements on DA Form 2028 (Recommended Changes to Publications and Blank Forms) to Commander, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, ATTN: 6900 Georgia Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20307-5001.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

OFFICIAL:

JAMES R. GREENWOOD
COL, MS
Deputy Commander for
Administration

ERIK J. GLOVER
MAJ, MS
Executive Officer

DISTRIBUTION:
A